

## **Report on taking Messy Church further at Hadley Holy Trinity and Wellington Christ Church**

*By Cerys Hughes, Messy Church Leader*

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### **Background:**

Friday Family Church was set up some 3 years ago as a way of engaging with families in the area and in particular with those that come for Baptism of children. Initially it wasn't set up as a Messy Church although the model and many of the values were similar and so over time it has evolved to be a true and good example of Messy Church.

Attendance at Friday Family Church is typically around 40 people of all ages and there are several families that attend every month whilst others attend less regularly. I am not aware of any families that have attended only once.

### **Why offer something deeper?**

Friday Family Church aims to introduce Jesus to those that are currently outside of the church community. It offers an opportunity for everyone to explore Bible stories and themes for themselves rather than just hear or be taught and therefore Christian nurture is at the heart of it. Friday Family Church welcomes people just as they are without any expectation that they will migrate to anything else within the church, however, I also recognise that through belonging to a thriving Christian community such as a Messy Church people may well begin to search for something more or something deeper.

Some families have attended Friday Family Church regularly since it began and there is evidence of families feeling a sense of belonging to the church community, for example through financial giving, donations of resources, people supporting and joining the leadership team and attendance at other church services and events, particularly at festivals.

### **What was offered?**

- **Take away sheets**

On arrival at Friday Family Church, families are given a Take Away Sheet, an example of which is attached. This sheet aims to make clear the programme for the session and gives details of the crafts and activities on offer.

The other side of the sheet suggests a simple activity to try at home and the aim of this is to encourage families to think about the Bible message and perhaps discuss or explore further at home. The sentences that accompany the craft descriptions aim to prompt reflection on the relevance of the craft activities and the sheet also gives details of other services and events at the church so that families feel part of the wider church community.

- **It's a Messy Mystery session**

Friday Family Church is a kinaesthetic experience and this is part of the reason that it appeals so well to the families. It is therefore important that any opportunity to explore further is offered in a similar format. For some families, Friday Family Church will be the only church contact they have ever had, whilst others will have some previous experience or knowledge and so there is no one identifiable starting point. Therefore, the planning team felt that it was not appropriate to try and call out families that may be interested in something further to something separate and so the opportunity to explore our thoughts and feelings about God was offered in a regular Friday Family Church session. The theme of this session was "It's a Messy Mystery", the planning documents are attached. The crafts and activities were all based on mystery and illusion and the celebration aimed to encourage us to reflect on our questions about God. Having thought about our questions about God, families were then invited to the additional session planned, Friday Family Café. Friday Family Café aims to create the space for us to explore our faith further within the values of Messy Church.

As Friday Family Church is relatively small (less than 50 people) and many people have attended for some time, there are good relationships within the community and leaders were therefore able to talk openly and honestly about the new programme without anyone feeling pressured into attending. It was also clear to everyone that there was no expectation for anyone to attend anything further and that Friday Family Church would continue in its existing format. I believe that relationship and trust are key to building Messy Church communities and it is important that these are not upset in our keenness to develop Messy Church further.

- **Friday Family Cafe**

To date Friday Family Café has been delivered 3 times, every other month in between Messy Church sessions. We recognise that any kind of discipleship initiative needs to be held regularly and the ultimate aim is for Friday Family Café to be held monthly, however, as Friday Family Café relies on an already overstretched leadership time this may take some time!

Friday Family Café aims to be true to the values of Messy Church because this is what the attending families are comfortable with. Therefore, each session has a time for **CREATIVITY**, a **CELEBRATION** and **EATING TOGETHER**. Friday Family Café is **ALL AGE** – Families are invited to attend together, the whole family is welcomed and the furniture used, refreshments provided, and any activities etc are appropriate for all ages.